



## Wisconsin Emergency Management Association

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### WEMA Members Assist Hurricane Katrina Recovery

Three members of the Wisconsin Emergency Management Association (WEMA) are in Biloxi, Mississippi, assisting Hurricane Katrina recovery efforts. Steve Braun, Grant County Emergency Management Director; Nancy Crowley, Manitowoc County Emergency Management Director; and Mike Ciardo, City of Whitewater Emergency Management Director were deployed to the region late last week as part of the Emergency Management Assistance Compact. During their 14-day deployment, these three WEMA members are paired with FEMA officials and put to work canvassing neighborhoods as part of a community relations team. Their role is to get critical disaster assistance information to the people most affected by the storm.

Because gasoline is in short supply, roads are blocked by debris, and electrical outages prevent radio and TV communication, these three emergency managers get the information out by foot. They work with FEMA officials in teams of two and walk through neighborhoods handing out assistance pamphlets and directing people where to go to find help. Braun, who also serves as the vice president of WEMA, says that observing the damage firsthand is worse than seeing it on TV.

"It took a while for things to sink in—seeing things on the TV are entirely different than actually being here. There are whole neighborhoods that don't exist anymore—piles of debris where houses used to be."

The devastation they have encountered is hard to comprehend. Braun says that one entire county he visited was completely demolished, every house flooded to the rafters by the storm surge, leaving nothing behind but piles of rubble and debris. He can not envision what it must have been like for people to ride out the storm in their homes. "It's hard to imagine what it was like to go through something like this... I've talked to people who have lost everything including family members."

Many of the people that Braun is working with in the FEMA Disaster Recovery Center are victims of the hurricane as well, having lost homes and loved ones. He says that he is happy to be able to go to Mississippi and serve on behalf of the citizens of Wisconsin.

"It's a good feeling to be down here and be able to do something to help."

The Wisconsin Emergency Management Association (WEMA) is an association of people and businesses that are interested in promoting effective emergency management planning, training, and exercise programs throughout the State of Wisconsin. The purpose of the Wisconsin Emergency Management Association is to advocate, promote and represent statewide emergency management interests in order to enhance the safety and security of all citizens.

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